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5 November 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Rajiv and India--The View of Key Scholars

1. At our suggestion,

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2. The scholars laid out factors that auger well and poorly for Rajiv but were not willing to give a bottom line on his prospects. They emphasized the deterioration in Indian political institutions and political communication during Ms. Gandhi's one-lady rule, but were optimistic about India's ability to weather the current storm.

3. Points of View/Key Questions

Politics

- Rajiv's selection demonstrates that his selectors had little political strength of their own.
- The wave of national sympathy is a very important plus for Rajiv, but even if he exploits it, the sympathy may not be enough to maintain him in power unless he consolidates his political base.
- He will have to rebuild the Congress Party. Will he select candidates for election on the basis of loyalty to him or try to divide the opposition by offering ticket places to ex-Congress Party members now in opposition? The scholars favored the latter approach, one noting that every Rajiv loyalist who is selected will produce five or six who resent the choice and may move to the opposition. The selection of candidates will be time-consuming and might even lead Rajiv to postpone elections at the expense of some diminution in the "sympathy" factor.

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- Opposition unity is unlikely beyond their admittedly important agreement to put up only one candidate in many districts.
- To build Party strength, Rajiv must move back toward submitting decisions to Party membership. This will help legitimize the Party and his own position and make him less dependent on the Army, police, and civil bureaucracy.
- Rajiv should consider improving relations with regional opposition leaders--a low-cost, potentially high-gain option.
- Rajiv is likely to have one circle of bureaucratic/policy advisers, many of whom will be inherited from his mother, and another circle of political advisers that he has developed in recent years as heir apparent.
- Rajiv faces a more difficult political environment than his mother did on taking office because of institutional decay and activation of the opposition.

The People and Rajiv

- Decentralization of power seems likely, but Rajiv may still emerge as cultural/mystical, all-powerful leader, if only because the Indian people seem to desire such a leader.
- Rajiv not only must bring communal violence under control, but must make some gesture to the Sikhs in the interest of national unity. The Indian citizenry has become increasingly inured to violence.
- There has been an erosion of secularism in India as a result of manipulation of religion for political/personal reasons.

Foreign Affairs

- Ms. Gandhi counseled restraint to those who wanted a tougher approach to Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Might Rajiv be more susceptible to such pressures?
- Because Rajiv and/or a new generation of leaders is likely to be making foreign policy in coming years, some adjustments are inevitable.

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Military

- A key concern of the military will be to prevent the rise of paramilitary and other internal security organs.
- The military will be interested in developing a more forward-looking military strategy, perhaps including preemptive war with Pakistan, that will require a continuing inflow of hardware and technology.

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